

CHRONIC WASTING DISEASE UPDATE

September 6, 2002

Minnesota has announced the finding of CWD in a captive elk in Aitkin County. The animal was a five-year-old male. It had been purchased from a captive facility in Stearns County in August of 2000. The herd where the elk was found has been placed under quarantine as has two additional facilities where the infected elk had resided prior to it coming to the farm in Aitkin County. Minnesota DNR officials will test wild deer in the area to determine if there is any sign of CWD in the free-ranging population. This is the first case of CWD in either captive or free-ranging cervids in Minnesota.

Several more states have passed bans on the importation of deer and elk carcasses from states where CWD has been found in wild animals. Previously the states of Colorado, Illinois and Iowa and the province of Manitoba had passed such bans. The states of Vermont, Oregon and Missouri have enacted similar bans. Numerous states have issued voluntary advisories to their out-of-state hunters encouraging them not to bring the carcass or carcass parts of deer and elk into their state. The bans do permit the importation of boned out meat, hides or cape with no meat attached, clean skull cap with antler attached, finished taxidermy heads or the ivories of elk. The state of Georgia has recently banned the importation of live cervids into that state also.

Some citizens of Colorado have formed a new political action group called Colorado Wildlife Defense (just happens that the acronym is CWD). The stated goal of this group are; Elimination of big game diseases, especially CWD; promotion of healthy wildlife habitat; promotion of scientifically sound wildlife research; promotion of a discussion of the ethics of hunting and wildlife management; education of the hunting and non hunting public. Their action plan calls for; requiring double fencing of all game farms at owners expense; all game farmers provide annual proof of bonding; prohibit new licenses for deer and elk farms; prohibit expansion in acreage of existing game farms; prohibit the transfer of game farm licenses; prohibit charging for hunting behind high wire; prohibit blocking of traditional migratory paths by high fences; requiring game farms to maintain environmental controls and prohibit the escape of contaminated water or soil; requiring immediate reporting of missing deer or elk from game farms; and requiring all game farm deer and elk to be tested for brucellosis and TB.

Wisconsin has announced that 7 more free-ranging deer have tested positive for CWD. They have expanded their eradication zone by an additional 15 square miles to cover these findings. The total number of free-ranging CWD positive in Wisconsin is now 31 white-tail deer.

In 2000, a elk farmer in Wisconsin received elk from a CWD exposed herd in Colorado. At that time, the farmer advised the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture that both animals from the exposed herd in Colorado were dead. He has now advised Wisconsin Ag. that he was mistaken and that one of the animals is still alive in his herd.

The second draft of the implementation documents for the National CWD Plan was distributed to committee members and others on Friday, August 30. The final documents are due to APHIS and USFWS on Friday, September 13.

The herd of captive elk in Oklahoma that had been exposed to CWD will be destroyed this week. This herd had an elk test positive for CWD in 1997 but the depopulation of the herd was not agreed to by the owners and federal representatives until this week. Since the discovery of CWD in the herd, the remaining animals have been under quarantine, however, in the meantime the herd has dropped from 150 animals to 74. Due to a lack of communication, not all of the 76 animals that died in the interim were tested for CWD. All remaining animals will be tested but the true degree of infection rate of the herd will never be known. The owners of the facility will not be permitted to restock the area with cervids for a period of five years.

A New York based organization, BioTech Research Fund I LLC has committed a \$1 million line of credit to fund commercialization of tests for brain-wasting disorders and production of various vaccines to Gene-Thera of Wheat Ridge, Colorado. Gene-Thera has spent three years developing new ways not only to diagnose CWD, but create vaccines for mad cow disease, E. coli contaminants and foot-and-mouth disease. Its tests for CWD have been successful in more than 100 samples from Colorado and Wisconsin according to company officials. Gene-Thera plans to license and market some of its disease test kits by the end of the year, then begin volume distribution by mid-2003.

The abstracts of the presentations from the CWD Conference in Denver August 6 and 7 have been posted on the Colorado Division of Wildlife web site. You will need adobe acrobat reader to read them. The Division web site is: http://wildlife.state.co.us/CWD/Symposium_booklet.pdf
If you don't have adobe acrobat, you can download it free at <http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readstep.html>